

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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Conyers Commends Oklahoma Reparations Litigation

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee, commended the Reparation Coordinating Committee for filing historic litigation in Tulsa, OK, to recover for damages arising from the 1921 domestic terrorist attack that destroyed the African-American Greenwood community. Conyers stated that, "Litigation is one of the many time-tested tactics for gaining redress for the direct financial harms suffered by the African-American community for discrimination. This litigation will not only serve to educate the nation about the violence that lay at the heart of Jim Crow and the need for reparations, it will also allow the survivors and descendants of Greenwood to recapture the dignity of their community."

"The Greenwood riot was the country's bloodiest civil disturbance of the 20th century. The riot was not only insidious for its reflection of racial hatred, but also because it was carried out under the color of law. Hundreds of the white mob were deputized and acted with the blessing of the city, state and National Guard as they terrorized the Greenwood district, killing more than 300, destroying 35 square blocks of homes and businesses, including the community's affluent business district, known locally as the Negro Wall Street."

"The nightmare of Greenwood, however, was soon banished from the newspapers, textbooks and civil conversation, so that most Tulsans born just 20 years later grew up with no idea that it had ever happened. Not until the Tulsa Race Riot Commission, established in 1997 by a joint resolution passed by the Oklahoma House of Representatives, did the horror of the atrocity return to light. Historical and archival research reveals reports of at least \$1.8 million worth of property damage in 1921 dollars. That is the equivalent to more than \$15.3 million in 2001. Sadly, this period in American history is filled with similar incidents (Knoxville, Chicago, Washington, DC) that faded from history without appropriate redress for its victims."

Conyers has introduced legislation (H.R. 40) that would establish a national commission to examine the institution of slavery, study the impact of subsequent and continuing discrimination against African-Americans resulting directly and indirectly from slavery, during the apartheid of reconstruction, desegregation and the present day. The commission would make recommendations concerning any form of apology and compensation.

